# R&B GEMS II

Music R&B/SOUL

The rock 'n' roll era : R & B ge

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The ROCK'N'ROLL ERA

Digital Remaster

*Otis Rush*

## R & B GEMS II

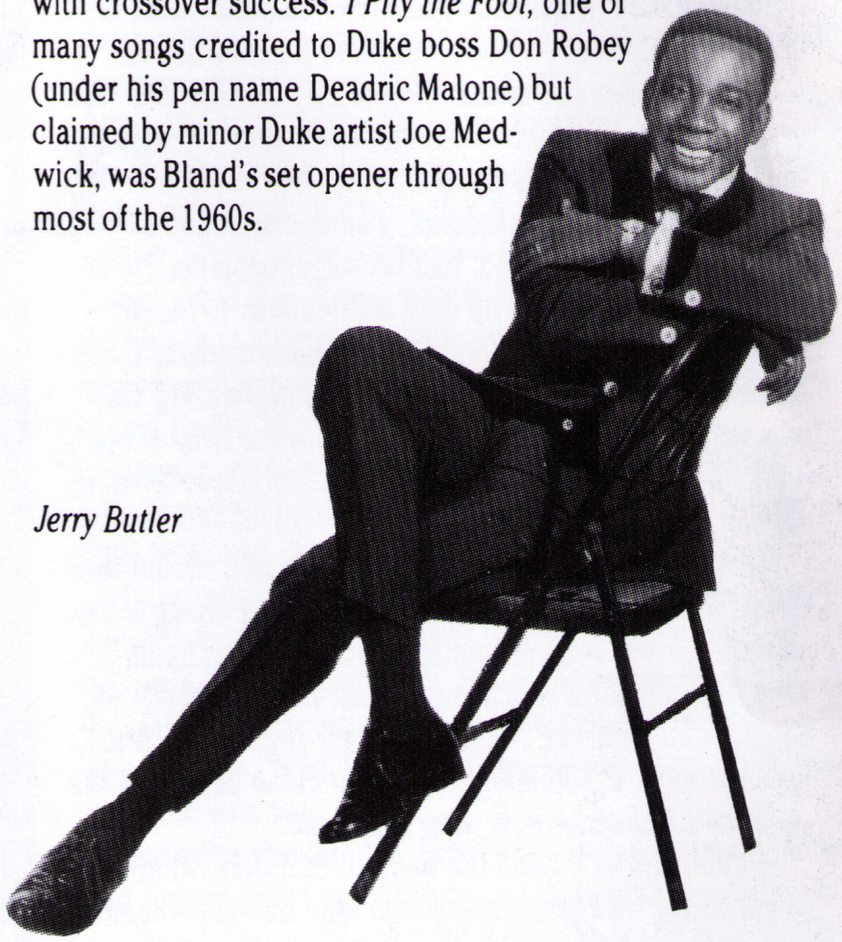
At the dawn of the rock 'n' roll era, it was common for rhythm and blues and even blues artists to occupy the pop charts right alongside Elvis, Jerry Lee and the Everlys. In fact, the whole field was so wide-open it begged the very question of what rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues were (the answer had as much to do with who listened to the music as with who performed it). Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley launched their careers with blues because that's where the opportunities for black men were before rock 'n' roll came along. They later enjoyed success on both the pop and R & B charts, but in retrospect they were clearly rockers more than anything else.

Diddley in particular went under-rewarded as a rock 'n' roller in his heyday; only one of his epochal singles, music that influenced virtually every blues-based rocker of the '60s, even made the Top 40. Bo was too raw, strictly rhythm and blues. Much of it was his patented "shave and a haircut two bits" beat, which he'd taken from the sanctified churches of his native Mississippi.

But Bo was also into Afro-Americanism to an extent even the most open-minded white fans were not quite ready for yet. His stage name (his real name was Ellas McDaniel), which he got hanging out on Chicago's South Side as a kid, was also the name of a one-stringed African guitar. And songs like **Mona** were evocative of voodoo incantation.

Berry was true to his roots but also managed to chart pop frequently. Many listeners took **Brown Eyed Handsome Man** (which was *not* one of his pop hits) as a coded reference to Chuck himself. In his 1987 autobiography, he described being moved to write the first verse after watching an Anglo cop hassle a Chicano fan during his first California tour. After that, Berry's imagination seems to have taken over; the lines about Venus de Milo were obliquely inspired by his reading of the S & M classic *Venus in Furs*.

Although most bluesmen had to be content with recognition from the R & B audience only, several did experience brushes with the pop charts. Young Bobby "Blue" Bland came from the country outside Memphis in the late 1940s and put in time as B. B. King's valet. He sang with the Beale Streeters (an impromptu group that included King, Johnny Ace and Rosco Gordon), recorded for a few indie labels in the early '50s, and toured with Junior Parker's band. His own records started taking off around 1957, but he didn't leave Parker until 1961, when **I Pity the Fool** made him a full-fledged star. Shaped by Joe Scott, A & R man at Houston-based Duke Records, Bland's exciting, sophisticated-but-rough sound made him a ladies' favorite with crossover success. *I Pity the Fool*, one of many songs credited to Duke boss Don Robey (under his pen name Deadric Malone) but claimed by minor Duke artist Joe Medwick, was Bland's set opener through most of the 1960s.



*Jerry Butler*

Little Junior Parker was one of the funkiest bluesmen of the '50s, and his *Mystery Train* was one of the songs that helped catapult Elvis into the spotlight. **Driving Wheel,** a blues standard written and first performed by Chicago pianist Roosevelt Sykes, was more or less Junior's theme song.

Otis Rush, who moved to Chicago from Mississippi as a teen and became a full-time bluesman in 1955 at the age of 21, is one of the music's hard-luck stories. A volatile guitarist known for his unorthodox use of minor chords, Rush cut the doom-laden **I Can't Quit You Baby** for Cobra (then the No. 2 Chicago blues label after Chess). Writer-producer Willie Dixon took a dub to Big Bill Hill of WOPA, who deejayed out of a cleaner's window on the South Side, and Hill helped it become a top-10 R & B hit. Despite this promising start, Rush recorded only a handful of sides in the next decade-plus. Discouraged by a series of bad record deals, he was virtually retired by the late '60s. But in the mid-'70s he reestablished himself as a key figure on the international blues circuit.

Jimmy Reed, a Gary, Indiana, steelworker when he began cutting R & B hits in 1955, had no such problems. He recorded frequently right up until his death in 1976. His primitive, relaxed harp-and-guitar boogies made him one of the most imitated bluesmen. **Bright Lights Big City** was written, like most of his songs, with the help of his wife, "Mama," who came to sessions to whisper lyrics in his ear as he sang.

Ike Turner was a bridge between blues and rhythm and blues. A talent scout for various labels while living in Mississippi, he was responsible for definitive sides by B. B. King, Howlin' Wolf and many others. His own band, the Kings of Rhythm, cut *Rocket 88,* often cited as the first genuine rock 'n' roll song, in 1951; it came out under the name of Jackie Brenston, who sang lead.

In 1956 Turner moved the band to St. Louis, where a brash young woman named Annie Mae Bullock wheedled her way onto his stage for a song. Ike liked what he saw

*The Spinners*

and heard so much that he incorporated her into the show as "Tina" and then in 1958 married her. They first recorded as Ike and Tina Turner in 1960, when she filled in for a singer who missed the session. **I Idolize You** is one of several hits they cut for the Sue label that attracted white listeners despite strong blues roots. Etta James was the other gutsy female shouter of this period who managed Top 40 appeal, thanks to material like **All I Could Do Was Cry** (co-written by Motown's Berry Gordy Jr.).

Most of the rest of these artists had little blues—but plenty of soul—in their music. With records like **Cry to Me,** Solomon Burke helped found the soul movement. Eddie Cooley is known primarily for co-writing Little Willie John's *Fever,* one of the landmark R & B hits of the era. **Priscilla** is one of only three singles he cut under his own name, and the only one to chart; it reveals rockabilly leanings unusual in northeastern urban black music.

The Chantels, led by the amazing Arlene Smith, were the trailblazers for the classic girl groups of the 1960s. Smith claimed she was taught singing by a nun at her Catholic school, where she was exposed to Gregorian chants and Latin hymns. The Bronx quintet was discovered singing backstage at a Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers concert by Richard Barrett of the Valentines, who wrote and produced **Every Night.**

**Doggin' Around** was a rare blues for Jackie Wilson, who began his career as Clyde McPhatter's replacement in Billy Ward and the Dominoes. Wilson went solo in 1957, and was known for his wailing, uninhibited shows. *Doggin' Around* and its flip side, *Night,* made up a two-sided hit, Wilson's biggest single ever. Ben E. King had been lead singer of the Drifters during their strings-and-ballads phase, and **I (Who Have Nothing)** was typical of his pop direction as a solo artist.

**Idol with the Golden Head** was one of the most clever, and lowest-charting, of the many novelty sides written and produced for the Coasters by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller.

Bobby Freeman was one of the few '50s rockers to emerge from San Francisco, and **Betty Lou Got a New Pair of Shoes** was the follow-up to his smash debut, *Do You Wanna Dance.*

Jerry Butler founded the Impressions (with Curtis Mayfield) in Chicago in 1957, but quickly went solo, enjoying his greatest success with ballads like **Make It Easy on Yourself.** The Detroit Spinners were formed by Harvey Fuqua after he left his original group, the Moonglows. He intended to keep the old name for the new group and record them for his new label, Tri-Phi. But after cutting **That's What Girls Are Made For,** he decided to change the name to the Spinners. This was the first single for both label and group.

Something of a cult figure among East Coast ballad aficionados, Chuck Jackson is not remembered in pop histories nearly as well as the two men who gave him **I Wake Up Crying** and several other hits. Hal David and Burt Bacharach's subsequent work with Dionne Warwick made them undisputed masters of the pop-soul sound later in the '60s. But that's another crossover story.

*—John Morthland*

*Jeanette "Baby" Washington*

## DISCOGRAPHY

**Indicates highest Billboard chart position*

**1. Betty Lou Got a New Pair of Shoes** Bobby Freeman • *Music and lyrics by Bobby Freeman. Josie 841 (1958). Under license from Rhino Records, Inc., by arrangement with Butterfly Entertainment Corp. No. 37 (R&B 20)**

**2. Mona** Bo Diddley • *Music and lyrics by Ellas McDaniel. Checker 870 (1957). Courtesy of Chess/MCA Records, Inc. Did not chart.*

**3. (Night Time Is) The Right Time** Ray Charles • *Music and lyrics by Lew Herman, Ozzie Cadena and Nappy Brown. Atlantic 2010 (1959). Backup vocals by the Raylettes. Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 95 (R&B 5)**

**4. Idol with the Golden Head** The Coasters • *Music and lyrics by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. Atco 6098 (1957). Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 64 (Did not chart R&B)**

**5. Priscilla** Eddie Cooley and the Dimples • *Music and lyrics by Eddie Cooley. Royal Roost 621 (1956). Under license from Rhino Records, Inc., by arrangement with Butterfly Entertainment Corp. No. 26 (Did not chart R&B)**

**6. Every Night (I Pray)** The Chantels • *Music and lyrics by Richard Barrett. End 1015 (1958). Under license from Rhino Records, Inc., by arrangement with Butterfly Entertainment Corp. No. 40 (R&B 16)**

**7. Brown Eyed Handsome Man** Chuck Berry • *Music and lyrics by Chuck Berry. Chess 1635 (1956). Courtesy of Chess/MCA Records, Inc. Did not chart pop (R&B 7)**

**8. I Can't Quit You Baby** Otis Rush • *Music and lyrics by Willie Dixon. Cobra 5000 (1956). Courtesy Paula Records. Did not chart pop (R&B 9)**

**9. Bright Lights Big City** Jimmy Reed • *Music and lyrics by Jimmy Reed. Vee-Jay 398 (1961). Courtesy of Vee-Jay Records. No. 58 (R&B 3)**

**10. I Pity the Fool** Bobby Bland • *Music and lyrics by Deadric Malone. Duke 332 (1961). Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 46 (R&B 1)**

**11. All I Could Do Was Cry** Etta James • *Music and lyrics by Berry Gordy Jr., Gwendolyn B. Gordy and Roquel Davis. Argo 5359 (1960). Courtesy of Chess/MCA Records, Inc. No. 33 (R&B 2)**

**12. I Idolize You** Ike and Tina Turner • *Music and lyrics by Ike Turner. Sue 735 (1960). Courtesy of EMI, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. No. 82 (R&B 5)**

**13. That's What Girls Are Made For** The Spinners • *Music and lyrics by Harvey Fuqua and Gwen Gordy. Tri-Phi 1001 (1961). Courtesy of Motown Record Company, L.P. No. 27 (R&B 5)**

**14. That's How Heartaches Are Made** Baby Washington • *Music and lyrics by Bob Halley and Ben Raleigh. Sue 783 (1963). Courtesy of EMI, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. No. 40 (R&B 10)**

**15. Driving Wheel** Little Junior Parker • *Music and lyrics by Roosevelt Sykes. Duke 335 (1961). Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 85 (R&B 5)**

**16. Cry to Me** Solomon Burke • *Music and lyrics by Bert Russell. Atlantic 2131 (1962). Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 44 (R&B 5)**

**17. Doggin' Around** Jackie Wilson • *Music and lyrics by Lena Agree. Brunswick 55166 (1960). Under license from Brunswick Records, Inc., by arrangement with Butterfly Entertainment Corp. No. 15 (R&B 1)**

**18. Midnight Stroll** The Revels • *Music and lyrics by Bill Jackson. Norgolde 103 (1959). Courtesy of Street Korner International Records and Tapes. No. 35 (R&B 20)**

**19. Who Do You Love** The Sapphires • *Music and lyrics by Kenneth Gamble and Jerry Ross. Swan 4162 (1964). Courtesy of Heritage Records. No. 25 (Did not chart R&B)**

**20. I (Who Have Nothing)** Ben E. King • *Music and lyrics by Jerry Leiber, Mike Stoller, Giulio Rapetti and Labati Donida. Atco 6267 (1963). Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 29 (R&B 16)**

**21. I Wake Up Crying** Chuck Jackson • *Music by Burt Bacharach, lyrics by Hal David. Wand 110 (1961). Courtesy of Highland Music, Inc. No. 59 (R&B 13)**

**22. Make It Easy on Yourself** Jerry Butler • *Music by Burt Bacharach, lyrics by Hal David. Vee-Jay 451 (1962). Courtesy of Chameleon/Vee-Jay Records. No. 20 (R&B 18)**

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20. **I (Who Have Nothing)** Ben E. King
21. **I Wake Up Crying**
22. **Make It Easy on**

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22. **Make It Easy on Yourself** Jerry Butler

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